

friends and ask them to look at the real world, instead of the kind of ideological box that they have put themselves in, and do something that will work.

The main thing we must do is we must do something that will work. And it would be better not to do anything at all than to adopt a program that would actually increase costs of health care and reduce coverage. That's what we don't want to do.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

*[Irving Silver, chairman of the B'nai B'rith Center for Public Policy, asked the President what the administration is doing to impress upon Yasser Arafat and the PLO that their agreement with Israel can only succeed if they accept the spirit as well as the letter of its provisions.]*

**The President.** Well, we're telling him just what you said, and we're doing it on a regular basis. The Secretary of State's in constant contact with Mr. Arafat. We are working with the PLO people. We understood all along that because they had never actually run a country before and operated a government and all of its manifestations, with all of its problems, that there would be more difficulties here, operational difficulties, in making the agreement actually work. But we are working hard on that. And we're also trying to provide assistance and support as well as pressure when that will help to get them to do what they're supposed to do.

We've also been very blessed in having a group of Jewish-American and Arab-American business people who are working together and are prepared to make some investments in those areas if we can get the PLO in a position where they can actually effectively function and implement this.

So I believe that the biggest problem is one of capacity. And I think the limited capacity is undermining the question of will from time to time. We just have to keep the pressure on and also have to keep working practically to increase the capacity for this agreement to be implemented by the PLO.

**Mr. Schiner.** Again, Mr. President, on behalf of the half million people and members who affiliate with B'nai B'rith in 51 countries, on 6 continents, we thank you for your warm

greeting and your important message. Thank you again.

**The President.** Thank you very much, Kent. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. from Room 459 of the Old Executive Office Building.

### **Interview With Gene Burns of WOR Radio, New York City**

*August 24, 1994*

**The President.** Glad to be here, Gene.

**Mr. Burns.** Do you feel like Daniel in the mouth of the lion's den? You and talk radio these days seem to have this running battle.

**The President.** We were talking before we went on the air; I really have always enjoyed talk radio and I've done a lot of it, particularly when I was Governor, and in my campaign I did a lot. I find that there's a certain immediacy to it that I like. I like the interviews and I like people being able to call in a question.

### **Administration Accomplishments and Goals**

**Mr. Burns.** George Stephanopoulos was here earlier, and he says in his view—and I assume he mirrors your own—your accomplishments in your first almost 2 years as President have not gotten through the screen of the media to the American people. Do you feel any sense of isolation here in terms of what you like, you've told us, that sort of one-on-one relationship with constituents?

**The President.** Oh, yes. I think part of it is the nature of the Presidency and the whole security bubble that's around the President. Part of it is the demanding nature of the job and the fact that Washington, DC, and its inner workings are a long way from the average life of most Americans. And part of it is the way news is reported today. News basically tends to be—a lot of studies have shown that the way news is reported tends to be more negative and more editorial, more commentary rather than what's going on.

A lot of the research shows that the American people are surprised to find out that in 1993, for example, I had more success in getting a very big program through Congress, with the economic program and NAFTA and

family leave, the Brady bill, than any President since the end of World War II except President Eisenhower's first year and President Johnson's second year.

So we're doing well here, I think, in moving forward in an extremely contentious environment. And I just have to find ways to communicate better with the American people not only what we're doing wrong—the press will tell them that—but also what we're doing right and where we're going.

**Mr. Burns.** From your side of the table, what's the nature of that contentious environment? I know that you, yourself, have pointed to a deep cynicism on the part of the American people. You feel in some respects the media drives that cynicism. But there does seem to be a sense of social disconnect. I mean, Jefferson said, Americans have the power; from time to time they give it to folks like yourself to exercise for them. And the first amendment ends with, "and they'll always have a direct route for the redress of grievances." A lot of Americans don't think they have that direct route.

**The President.** I agree with that. I was reading this morning, interestingly enough, James Madison's "Federalist Papers." And he was arguing why a republican form of government, meaning representative form of government, was better for big countries, that you had to elect representatives and then they'd do what they thought was right. Then they'd report back, be held accountable, and be elected or defeated by the voters.

I think today there is so much—there's a lot of information about what we're doing up here, but I don't think there's a lot of basic understanding that we impart. And I think that voters know that too many decisions get made here on the basis of organized interest which may or may not be the same as the public interest.

And I think that at a time of real change, when people are uncertain about where we're going, it's just easy for negative impulses, for fears, for cynicism to overcome hopes in looking toward the future.

I also believe, and many astute people in the press have pointed this out lately, that voters themselves feel a certain ambivalence. That is, they want us to do things up here. I got elected to take action, to deal with the

economy, to deal with crime, to deal with the breakdown of family, to promote welfare reform, to deal with the health care crisis. But people still basically are very skeptical about the Government's ability to do it. So we want, in a way, a Government that is more active but basically that is active in empowering the private sector to do things, rather than active in doing things directly. I think that's where the voters are.

And a lot of times that explains the apparently contradictory feelings people have about what we're doing here, that they want us to be active and address the problems but they don't necessarily trust the Government to do it. Or as we say at home, a lot of people think Government would mess up a one-car parade. [Laughter]

**Mr. Burns.** You're a student of history. Do you think that's because Camelot was illusory in the last analysis, that it's a mythical thing and that people are disappointed with both the Congress and various holders of your office? Is that the problem?

**The President.** Oh, only partly. I think, first of all, the American people have always, always had a deep-seated skepticism about government generally and especially their National Government. I think that we've also been told for years that government was bad. And I think that we need a clearer definition; this is partly my job. I've got to do a better job of telling the American people in very clear terms, often through a fog of people, you know, disagreeing with me or with my characterization of it—I've got to do a better job of saying, okay, look, here is what we can do, here are our problems, here are our opportunities, here's what the National Government should do and here's what we cannot do, here's the partnership we have to have. That's what I called my new Democratic philosophy when I ran in 1992.

I share what I think is the feeling of a majority of our fellow citizens, that the government should be limited in many ways and that government should do those things which it is required to do but no more than it is required to do.

**Mr. Burns.** I mean, that's an excellent point. The Wall Street Journal reports this morning that Al From of the Democratic leadership conference just sent you a big

memo, five or six pages long. I'm not trying to invade your private correspondence, but one of the things they say he said to you was, rightly or wrongly, you have become too identified with liberal causes on Capitol Hill and therefore don't appear to some of the people who supported you initially as this centrist Democrat, which you said you were.

**The President.** I think that's right. And I think some of that may be my fault in terms of characterization. But if you look at what we've actually done, if you look at the economic program that I've put in place, it's bringing the deficit down for 3 years in a row, it's reducing the Federal Government by 272,000—certainly not a traditional liberal thing to do—to the smallest Federal Government we've had since Kennedy was President. We're taking all the savings and putting it into the fight against crime, which is basically money to people at the grassroots local level. We're addressing the issues like welfare reform partly with tax cuts for working families with lower incomes and tougher child support enforcement—not traditional liberal programs.

I think what happened was, more than anything else, the health care program has been characterized as a big Government program, even though it took what, at the time I proposed it, was the moderate course, which is not having a Government-financed health care program but simply having a program in which the Government requires everybody to buy private insurance and then gives tax breaks or discounts to people who can't afford it on their own. That was the moderate proposal when we started. And every time we've sought to compromise, the other guys have always moved kind of further and further to the right.

But I think that the health care debate more than anything else—we've had \$140 million now spent in lobbying and advertising on health care by organized interests, the largest amount in American history, far more than was spent by the candidates in the Presidential campaign last time.

When that happened, I think that that—I have been portrayed as sort of the apostle of big Government. Actually, that is not an accurate portrayal. I'm about reinventing Government. I'm trying to bring the Federal

Government down. My Republican predecessors never attempted to do anything as ambitious as reducing the Federal Government to its smallest size in 30 years. I have fought for things that Democrats often don't fight for, including all these trade agreements to expand trade. I have fought to put the Government in partnership with our business interests overseas. Yesterday, just to give you a little example, we announced that for the first time in over 20 years, farmers in the Pacific Northwest will be able to sell their apples in Japan. For the first time ever, farmers in California are selling rice in Japan. These are the things that I have worked on.

But there are some things that I believe—and this is worth debating—that the Government has to do. And when we have to do something, it should be as limited and efficient as possible. But there are some things that if we don't do it, it won't get done.

**Mr. Burns.** Well, Mr. President, on the lobbying money, John Connally spent \$10 million because he wanted to be President of the United States, and it was all wasted money, as we both know.

**The President.** He got one delegate—

**Mr. Burns.** He got one delegate—

**The President.** —from my home State. I know her.

**Mr. Burns.** Well, there you are.

**The President.** I know her well.

**Mr. Burns.** That's a pretty high delegate, you know. So all of this money being spent by the special interests on health care, which has to be conceded has been spent, is not going to get a warm reception unless there is a general fear of the growth of Government in the first place.

**The President.** I think that's right. I agree with that. I think—one of the things that Al From said to me with the Democratic Leadership Council—not in this memo, but I think it captures in one sentence the dilemma I face as President in trying to move into a post-cold-war world and take this country into the 21st century with a strategy for growth and opportunity, where the Government is not either just sitting on the sidelines or trying to solve problems but is being a partner with the American people—he said we are basically back in 1965 in what we want Government to do, but we're about in 1980

in what we trust Government to do, that is, the year President Reagan was elected.

So people have high aspirations for what they wish us to do, but they don't trust us to do much. And they're afraid we'll mess it up. So it's easy to derail almost any initiative by saying, well, this thing is wrong with it or that or the other thing. We are a people of—a democratic government requires some flexibility and compromise and people working together. And somehow, we've got to find a way to recreate that spirit. Now, it happened on the NAFTA debate, and it happened last week on crime in the House. It was wonderful to see these Democrats and Republicans sitting down together, cutting unnecessary spending, redirecting the programs, making sure we only told the American people we were going to spend what we could, in fact, spend from reducing the size of the Federal Government. That's what we need more of, that sort of thing.

### **Crime Legislation**

**Mr. Burns.** George Stephanopoulos answered this question. I guess this is a test as to whether he's really reflecting what you believe as President of the United States. Why not break out the component parts of the crime bill? You and I both know that many of those components would fly through the Congress with no opposition—more police, more prisons. You might even win the assault weapons ban issue. Why doggedly say it's all or nothing?

**The President.** Well, for one thing, I'm not sure that it would all pass. There is an answer to that. The first answer is, the House adopted them separately and together. The Senate, 95 to 4, before this issue got politicized, voted for a crime bill that is very much like the crime bill now before it that is so far not being permitted to come to a vote—95 to 4. They voted for a bill that had prevention, punishment, prisons, police——

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:18 p.m. in Room 459 of the Old Executive Office Building. The broadcast of this interview was terminated due to the station's scheduled 4:30 newscast.

### **Statement on the Observance of International Literacy Day**

*August 24, 1994*

On International Literacy Day, I am delighted to salute the many men and women who work so diligently to empower all people with the invaluable ability to read.

If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens. Nearly half of American adults lack many of the basic literacy skills so essential to success in today's complex and ever-changing world. Literacy is not a luxury; it is a right and a responsibility. And in an international community increasingly dedicated to the principles of equality and opportunity, illiteracy is unacceptable.

It takes great courage and hard work to overcome illiteracy. But with the help of dedicated teachers, tutors, and volunteers, everyone can learn the joys of reading and writing. These caring partnerships are the essence of community service, bringing hope and inspiration to all of us.

As people around the world celebrate International Literacy Day, I stand with you in working toward the goal of universal literacy. I am proud to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the countless individuals whose tireless efforts are helping to put this dream within our grasp.

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: International Literacy Day will be observed on September 8, 1994. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

### **Remarks on Crime Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters**

*August 25, 1994*

**The President.** Good afternoon. For 6 long years, the American people have watched and waited as Washington talked about stemming the tide of crime and violence in this country but did not act. Today Senators of both parties took a brave and promising step to bring the long, hard wait for a crime bill closer to an end.